

## In Memoriam

### Professor Olgierd Smoleński

On 16 January 2015, Professor Olgierd Smoleński passed away. He was a participant in the team that contributed to the first renal transplant in Krakow, Head of the Dialysis Centre in the Nephrology Clinic at the Jagiellonian University Medical College in Krakow, Head of the Nephrology and Dialysis Therapy Unit at the Ludwik Rydygier Memorial Specialised Hospital, Coordinator and Scientific Consultant at the Fresenius NephroCare II Dialysis Centre in Krakow, Professor Extraordinarius in the Faculty of Rehabilitation at the University of Physical Education in Krakow, Head of the Rehabilitation Section for Internal Diseases in the Department of Clinical Rehabilitation at the University of Physical Education in Krakow, initiator and organiser of the Krakow Dialysis Therapy Days, as well as an accomplished doctor and an excellent didactician.

Professor Olgierd Smoleński was born in Vilnius in 1937. He spent his childhood and early youth in Bochnia, where he graduated from the King Casimir the Great Secondary School in 1957. In 1963, he obtained a diploma in medicine, having completed his medical studies in the Faculty of Medicine at the Nicolaus Copernicus Academy of Medicine in Krakow. For many years, he tied his scientific and his professional future to the Second Clinic of Internal Medicine at the Academy of Medicine in Krakow, and later to the Clinic of Nephrology at the Academy of Medicine in Krakow, led by Professor Zygmunt Hanicki until 1989, where he obtained the title of Specialist in Internal Medicine, specialising in nephrology with a doctorate and an habilitation degree. Between 1976 and 1992, Professor Smoleński was Head of the Dialysis Centre in the Nephrology Clinic at the Academy of Medicine in Krakow, where he actively contributed to the creation of a network of dialysis units in the Malopolska region. In the 1970s, he was also actively involved in the development of the renal transplant programme, which resulted in the first successful renal transplant in Krakow, performed in 1975 by Doctor Romuald Drop at the Third Department and Clinic of the Academy of Medicine in Krakow.

In 1992, Olgierd Smoleński, who was already an assistant professor, became Head of the Nephrology and Dialysis Therapy Unit at the Ludwik Rydygier Memorial Specialised Hospital. After the privatisation of the department in 2006, he became the coordinator and a scientific consultant at the Fresenius NephroCare II Dialysis Centre in Krakow. In 1996, Assistant Professor Smoleński was nominated to be Professor Extraordinarius in the Faculty of Rehabilitation at the University of Physical Education in Krakow, where he became the Head of the Rehabilitation Section for Internal Diseases. At the same time, he pursued his second professional and scientific passion, which was the rehabilitation of dialysis patients and patients with nephrologic and urologic diseases. From 2003, Professor Smoleński was a lecturer at the State Higher Vocational School in Tarnow.

Olgierd Smoleński's scientific achievements include authoring or co-authoring 56 original reports, 7 chapters in medical textbooks and over 30 congress reports presented in Poland and abroad. As a university teacher and a master in his profession, he supervised the writing of 14 doctoral theses; and 12 doctors obtained speciality degrees in nephrology and 21 obtained degrees in internal medicine under his guidance. He reviewed 25 doctoral theses and 1 habilitation thesis. In addition, 50 master's theses and nearly 140 bachelor's theses were written under his guidance.



Professor Smoleński was active as a member of the Nephrology Committee of the Polish Academy of Science, the Academic Council of Polish Nephrology and Dialysotherapy, and the Council of Nephrology and Hypertension. He was a lecturer in the Faculty of Biology at Jagiellonian University and of Biomechanics in the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering at the Krakow University of Technology. He presided at the Krakow Branch of the Polish Society of Nephrology for two terms of office. He was also an active member of: the Polish Society of Nephrology (which bestowed an honorary membership upon him); the European Renal Association (ERA); and the European Dialysis and Transplant Association (EDTA). His scientific, educational, organisational and social activities were recognised by numerous awards and honours, including: scientific and educational awards from the Polish Minister of Health, the Medal of Vilnius University, the Honoris Gratia Medal awarded by the Mayor of the City of Krakow, the Henryk Nowak medal awarded to him by the Krakow Medical Association, and the Knight's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta.

Medicine, and in particular nephrology, was Professor Smoleński's great passion. In medicine, he not only became a doctor, scientist and organiser of various programmes, but also helped to popularise science. He overcame many barriers, the best proof of which was the organisation of the first Krakow Dialysis Therapy Days in 1994. This event was planned as a symposium that would take place every two years where doctors, nurses, dialysis technicians, dieticians and persons directly involved with dialysis therapy were invited to take part. At a few of the recent meetings, patients also took part in special sessions. In the scientific programme of the Krakow Dialysis Therapy Days, Professor Smoleński always ensured the most important topics and current issues in dialysis therapy were included, such as: the correct use of vascular access; new applications of dialysis therapy in the treatment of circulatory failure; issues in the rehabilitation of dialysis patients; problems and risks of infection in dialysis centres; and finally, the key issues in recent years, the problem of nephroeconomics and the financing of dialysis therapy in Poland – and interdisciplinary medical problems related to onconeurology, nephrocardiology, nephrodiabetology and transplantology. Professor Smoleński contributed to the view that being a lecturer at the Krakow Dialysis Therapy Days was a kind of ennoblement in the community, and the number of participants proves the success of the symposium. The last 11<sup>th</sup> Krakow Dialysis Therapy Days in September 2014 was attended by 1450 participants, allowing us to confirm that Poland's largest nephrology conference is held every two years right here in Krakow!

Additionally, thanks to Professor Olgierd Smoleński's initiative and efforts, a working group for rehabilitation in internal medicine was formed at the Polish Society of Nephrology. One of his successes was the 1<sup>st</sup> Polish Symposium on "Rehabilitation in renal and urinary tract diseases", which he organised in 2013 together with the Faculty of Rehabilitation at the University of Physical Education in Krakow. The aim of this event was to present the magnitude of the health problems in these patients, as well as the benefits they can receive from a correctly planned and implemented comprehensive rehabilitation programme.

The Amicus Renis Foundation encompasses a wide area of activities involving medical, educational and social aspects, and was established by Professor Olgierd Smoleński, among others, in 1994. The aim of the foundation was to popularise modern knowledge about renal diseases, including their prevention, diagnosis and treatment methods, with a particular emphasis on dialysis therapy and transplantology in the Malopolska region. The foundation awards scientific and training scholarships to young nephrologists, supports the purchasing of equipment for dialysis and nephrology centres, and offers financial support for poor patients by helping them to finance the purchasing of medicines indispensable during their treatment. As the president of the foundation, Professor Olgierd Smoleński constantly had new ideas – and was always asking what more could be done? Once every two years, the Amicus Renis Foundation offers an award for the best Polish publication on the topic of nephrology and transplantology.

Since 2002, the Amicus Renis Foundation has participated in the publication of the "Dialysis and You" quarterly, the first Polish magazine for dialysis and kidney transplant patients. The quarterly was the idea of Professor Smoleński, and was the apple of his eye. Over time, after establishing a collaboration with the Polish Kidney Association, it became an important forum for exchanges of ideas and a source of knowledge about nephrology, dialysis and kidney transplants for several thousand dialysis and transplant patients in Poland, but also for thousands of the nurses and doctors who work in the dialysis units. Despite having passed the retirement age, Professor Smoleński remained an active participant at every nephrology conference in Poland and Europe, and a person recognised by the community of Polish and international nephrologists who respected his academic achievements and recognised his professional expertise.

God needed a good nephrologist! An extraordinary man has passed away. An erudite, humanist, lover and a connoisseur of art and literature, who was also a poet and comedian in

the “Cyrulik” [English: Barber Surgeon] cabaret group in his younger years. In the 1960s, he was recognised in Krakow as a man who was connected to the Polish Students’ Association and the famous “Piwnica pod Baranami” [English: Cellar under the Rams] cabaret. For many of us, he did not fit within the mould of a typical professional medical practitioner. He was a restless spirit who once transported a kidney for the first transplant in Krakow in his Trabant, and soon after that stood next to the first patient undergoing dialysis in the newly opened dialysis centre in Tarnow. It was important to him to personally watch how it was going, because it was the crowning achievement of all the work and effort he had put into building a dialysis unit there! In 2013, he appeared up in Bochnia, the town of his childhood and youth, to reminisce about “Bochnia and Medicine” from the perspective of the “Bochnia Literary Almanac” published 58 years earlier, which he had co-edited. Soon after, he could be found hiding in Zawoja to relax in the shadows of the Babia Gora Mountain or inviting people to a working meeting concerning the next Dialysis Therapy Days, where he would argue for hours about who was to speak and on what subject. What he wanted the most was a new or controversial topic and a perfect lecturer!

Professor Smoleński was a pragmatist who used his knowledge and experience to help in the creation of the first dialysis units in the Malopolska region, as well as new and modern nephrology and dialysis units at the Rydygier Hospital in Krakow, where European standards for dialysis were implemented for the first time in Poland. His cheerfulness and warmth were contagious. He was always the most highly trusted doctor for his patients, and always tried to be helpful, even in doing the impossible. He was always there for others, and never thought of himself when patients stood before him in humility and despair as their medical problems overwhelmed them. He was very popular among students, who forgave him that the first medical examination questions sometimes concerned Mickiewicz, Asnyk or Tetmajer; or a theatrical play they had recently seen, a music album they had bought or a painting exhibition – as he was always up to date with what was happening at the National Museum in Krakow. He was patient as an examiner and as a thesis advisor he was tolerant of the ideas of his doctoral, master’s and bachelor’s students, whom he helped to obtain successive degrees in their academic and professional careers.

As a doctor, Professor Smoleński always followed the principle of building a bond of trust. He told his patients the truth about the limits of the possibilities and strictly kept his promises, or at least explained why he could not keep them. As a nephrologist, he did not delay making decisions that were important and difficult for his patients, especially those concerning dialysis therapy. He always helped patients in making their own decision, rather than making a decision on their behalf, and he always had the time to talk to each patient about their disease and their health. In this way, he won them over, they valued and respected him, and they loved him. He repeatedly said that the longer he was a doctor, the more humbly and respectfully he deferred to the personalities and habits of his patients. Nonetheless, despite his hearty approach to patients, he never exceeded the limits of intimacy that exist between a doctor and a patient, which is a balance many doctors often fail to achieve when working as a nephrologist with the same patients for many years.

With the passing of Professor Olgierd Smoleński, Krakow has lost a prominent doctor, and the Polish nephrology community has experienced an irretrievable loss. Emptiness has

filled the hearts of his many colleagues, doctors, friends, and especially his patients. This is also a time for reflection. Speaking for his colleagues, it is good that *Olgierd Smoleński* crossed the path of our professional lives, and it is good that he counted us among his close friends; and speaking for his patients it is good that he treated us. May we all appreciate who and what he was for us, in the time we had together.

*It is with deepest sorrow that we say goodbye to Professor Olgierd Smoleński.*

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